

Social pedagogy in a professional Norwegian child welfare context

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Abstract

This article is on the issue of social pedagogy in a professional Norwegian child welfare context. Gerd Hagen's analysis and argumentation on child welfare is a point of departure. In a too wide understanding of child welfare social pedagogy aims to promote the general development and welfare of children and youth. When the child welfare field is too narrowly drawn, the aim of social pedagogy is focused on efforts that are based on the Norwegian Child Welfare Law of 1993. A third perspective identifies and argues for social pedagogy as the aim and efforts of public and private organizations to protect and foster children and youth who are in particular need of education, (upbringing), training, care and treatment. Social pedagogy in a professional Norwegian child welfare context merges a Scandinavian and a Continental European social pedagogical tradition with a British and American social work tradition. At the same time, it has developed in its own right as an integrated element within the Norwegian welfare state organization. Social pedagogy is influenced by the development of official state policy, changes in the field of practice and theory production.

Introduction

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This article reflects upon and discusses the issue of social pedagogy by asking the question; what is included in the concept of social pedagogy, and more precisely, what is social pedagogy within the professional Norwegian child welfare context?

Representing a socio cultural and historical phenomenon some other questions are implicit. Where, when and how is social pedagogy practiced? Who are the practitioners? Who are the recipients of social pedagogical practice? And finally, one last important question: Why is it, or why should it be practiced in this way? The answers to these questions can be outlined in different ways.

I will start the analyze of social pedagogy in a child welfare field disclosing key components, i.e. (a) the concept and field of *child welfare*, (b) the *social* component in the concept of social pedagogy and (c) and the pedagogical component in the concept of social pedagogy. Each of these three elements is point of departure for further nuances in the discussion on social pedagogy. A grounded triangular model will be introduced to visualize and structure the above aspects and factors within a contemporary and professional Norwegian child welfare context. The reflections, analysis and discussion are first of all of a theoretical character and based on texts, theories, white papers and national laws.

Child welfare, a contextual point of departure to social pedagogy

Child welfare is a prominent contextual point of departure for social pedagogy. The practice of child welfare educators (*barnevernspedagog*, the title that candidates receive) is referred to as social pedagogy (UF, 2005). Child welfare also points to the target group, children, and the normative value and aim of welfare. In the Norwegian child welfare context, a child is a person who has not yet reached the age of 18 years and includes the category youth. I will follow Gerd Hagen's three definitions of the child welfare field before I concentrate on the concept of social and pedagogy (Hagen 2001). The different definitions disclose a variety of ways to single out the people or group to

promote child welfare activities and point to a diverse group of children, the target group that are meant to benefit from it.

The first and most extensive definition of the child welfare field aims to promote the general development and welfare of children and youth (Ibid.). This includes efforts that are of a private or official character (Ibid. p. 13). Hagen's approach is a historical one. Her point of departure is the 12th Century and she describes the child welfare and the development from a more private responsibility and which increasingly became the responsibility of public institutions. Without further comments, she concludes that this definition is "... too wide to provide any meaning", (I assume in a professional child welfare field) (Ibid.). We do not have to agree with her here. This definition raises two key questions within social pedagogy i.e. who is constituted to be its practitioners in the child welfare field and who are the recipients of social pedagogical practice? I will address this matter later on in this article. For now, I will follow Hagen's statement and proceed to the second definition of child welfare.

The second and most narrow definition of the child welfare field, according to Hagen, is determined by the Child Welfare Law (1993) and its guidelines. The field is structured to address individual cases, i.e. the children and youth that are described in this law and the municipal child welfare services and child welfare institutions that are mandated to act on behalf of these children. Municipal child welfare services are required to intervene in individual cases where child neglect or child abuse occurs, or is suspected of occurring. Children or youth suffering from serious behavior problems is another type of individual case that municipal child welfare services must tackle. With the changes in the Child Welfare Law of 1953 a greater degree of emphasis was put upon preventive functions, i.e. efforts to hinder or minimize the risk for serious problems or negative situations to develop. Today the child welfare professional in official child welfare services are mandated to support the children and youth in their home and to support parents who have difficulties in meeting the needs of their children. A general policy and value in the child welfare field is formulated in "the best interest of the child" and to use milder interventions first in efforts to support parents and children, before more serious interventions are utilized. Both are legal principles that are used to guide every effort

taken by municipal child welfare authorities. If the milder efforts are fruitless decisions to remove a child or youth from its home can be made and to place it into foster families or residential homes. Another preventive area that also is emphasized by the law (after 1953) is cooperation between the child welfare service and other organizations, private or official once aiming to support the children's well being (Ibid.). While Hagen considered the first definition of child welfare too extensive and the second definition too narrow, she argues in preference for the adoption of a third definition.

In the third definition of child welfare field that Hagen presents, the target group is specified as being children who are living in a difficult life situation and "...who are in particular need of care, upbringing, training or treatment" (Ibid. p. 14.). Hagen also points out that public and private organizations are the ones to fulfill these functions. In contemporary Norway, such organizations include public maternal and child health clinics, kindergartens, schools and after-school programs, public supported youth clubs as well as sport clubs and other public and privately supported programs for children and youth. We are also made aware of the comprehensive view of the entire child welfare field and the huge network of private and public institutions that interact in the effort to generate and provide care, upbringing, training to children and youth who have a particular need for these services. How this system is functioning she argues, influences also the professional child welfare in the second definition. This third definition is positioned somewhere in between the first and the second definition. The target group of children and those who are to provide these children with care and services is narrower defined than the ones proposed by the first definition, but it is wider than the ones proposed by the second definition. It narrows the target group to children in particular need and living in a difficult life situation.

The social aspect of social pedagogy in a child welfare context

The *social* aspect with reference to the concept of social pedagogy can be outlined in different ways. I will address three, the aspect of socialization, that of societal analysis and that of social work.

Socialization refers to the process of becoming a conscious and active person within a specific socio – cultural context and historical time. It is considered to be a fundamental and necessary human process in any society (Bø 2000, Aasen og Haugaløkken 94). While growing up, the child enters into the process of becoming a participant in the social life of its surrounding. This includes developing communication skills, how to cooperate with others, moral values and practical competencies that are necessary in the successfully transition from childhood to a responsible and self-supporting life as adults in a particular socio–cultural and natural environment. The process of socialization is often contrasted to the process of individuation and it also questions the process of the child assimilating into society and the individual personality liberating and changing it (Bø 2000, Johansen and Sommer 2006, Kvaran 1996, Herberg and Jóhannesdóttir 2007). In some theories, it is argued that one or the other is more important, but other theories argue the importance of both and reciprocal.

Social (in social pedagogy) as a second focus is related to the concept *society* and *societal analyses*. There is a connection to the above socialization but now in another professional analytical view. A professional analysis of the individual is linked together with an analysis of society or an analysis of societal factors. It is argued that the material conditions that constitute the child's situation must be included, as well as the prevailing value orientations in the child's environment and how these stimulate or hinder the development and growth of individuals and groups in society (KUF 1975:32, HIO 2009 - 2010). As well as analyzing the child's social and cultural environment a societal analysis shall also include the child's physical and psychological development. In a national white paper on the field of child welfare and social work education it is also referred to as a holistic analysis (UF 2005). A child's problems, it is argued, must not solely be analyzed as the problems of an individual, the societal influences i.e. economic disparities and political decisions must also be included in the analysis.

Finally, the third meaning of *social* that is also an influential component in the construction of child welfare and social pedagogy is in the concept of *social work*. Like child welfare above there are extensive and narrow definitions that can be utilized to delineate the social work field. Social work can be referred to as the efforts expended in

helping people in need and without the capacity to deal with it by their own and in their personal environment, or more narrowly defined by referring to the particular Norwegian law governing social welfare services (Kokkin, 2005, Levin 2004, Herberg and Jóhannesdóttir 2007). In Norway, there is one law governing child welfare services and another governing social welfare services. The services are organized separately but both are part of the Norwegian welfare state organization. In other nations, for example the Danish state the two services are organized in one (Madsen 2006).

Social work is a field of practice and profession, similar to that of child welfare and it also designates a professional discipline, similar to social pedagogy. The professional discipline and practice of the social work profession is referred to as social work. The professional discipline and practice of child welfare educators (barnevernspedagog, the title that candidates receive) is referred to as social pedagogy (UF, 2005). In the Norwegian education of social work and child welfare their closeness to each other shows in that the child welfare education is stated as a social work education (Ibid.). Theoretically both programs also deal with topics like communication, cooperation, conflict resolution and group work. This raises a question; why this difference in Norway with reference to social work and social pedagogy? One approach to this question is to analyze the concept of *pedagogy*.

What is the meaning of pedagogy in the social pedagogical field?

Pedagogy can be defined in different ways. In a narrow definition it is often referred to as the process (or science and discipline) of teaching and training within a formal school system. In a wider understanding pedagogy includes child-rearing theories and practices, i.e. the science of raising children as well as the element of training and 'care' as a fundamental aspect. The expanded understanding of pedagogy is a fundament of the way it is understood in the child welfare field. Historically, the pedagogical approach was an alternative to the criminological approach that was utilized upon marginalized children and their families (Hagen 2001). It also became an alternative to the clinical approach which also is applied to children and youth who for example display

problematic or traumatic behavior. In the Norwegian child welfare context pedagogy includes three formulations; raising the child, training and care (HIO 2009-2010, Mathiesen, 2008, Kvaran, 1996, Hagen 2001).

The raising of children is fundamental in the family as well as in the kindergarten, the school or in a residential home for youth. The fundamental responsibility is on the parents. However, in modern societies, this responsibility is shared with many other social institutions. Theoretically pedagogy approaches its praxis in different ways. In some theories focus is on the asymmetrical relation and the question of how to help the child toward a mutual responsibility. Other theories point of departure is the child's physically, mentally, emotionally and morally as well as socially and socio political education (Evenshaug and Hallen 97, 93, Rørvik 82). Today, similar to socialization, an individual as well a collective and historical societal dimension is often argued for (Ibid. UF, 2005, Bisgaard and Torp 1996).

Education and training, the second component in the pedagogical approach often refers to the conscious and planned learning process of children and youth. It is fruitful to view this training contextual. When connected to an official school system this training is often related to the central aim of teaching subjects like language, geography or history that is considered important in a particular society. However, a central aim is also the social and moral education and training. In another institution, a residential home for youth, training is related to daily activities with the institutional ideology, responsibility as an important frame of reference. Education and planned training can directly activate the child in a predefined way or it can indirectly promote changes in the child's environment. These changes can be of material character but also, in the child welfare field be to guide or train parents so that they manage in a better way to deal with or care for their children.

Care is the third aspect of pedagogy in a child welfare context. Providing the child with care is seen necessary for the child's welfare and growth. Within the context of the child welfare field, care shall contribute to satisfy substantial needs at for the child and youth right time (Nygren 1995, Kvaran 1996, Hagen 2001). It is also argued to be fundamental to the raising of a child as well as its training. Care has also another central

position in the child welfare context, when children suffer from the lack of it. If and when parents are unable to provide the child with sufficient care, support is provided to parents, and if this too fails, the child is removed from its home and provided a foster home where care is provided under the supervision of municipal child welfare authorities.

The pedagogical understanding in the sense of the child's raising, training and care are fundament in the child welfare ideology today. Utilized in this meaning it has also much in common to social pedagogy – but the two concepts do not necessarily have an identical history or argumentation. Before entering some of the different theoretical positions, I will discuss social pedagogy in the light of the above outlining and with the help of a grounded triangle model.

A triangle model and a discussion of social pedagogy in a child welfare context

To construct a triangle model can be a fruitful analytical tool when interested in discussing social pedagogy in a child welfare context without losing its complexity out of view (Fig.1). By looking at the component parts that make up each of the constituent sides of the triangle, and by seeing how these component parts can interact with one another, a better understanding of the discipline of social pedagogy in its ambiguity should be more easily achieved. The model represents a visualized structure and the discussion is withdrawn from reality and practical life. At the same time this abstract frame of reference can show some of the reasoning and questions often fundamental to the praxis field.

The upper side of the triangle in figure 1 visualizes the child welfare field (Fig.1). The second line on the left hand shows the social dimension of social pedagogy and the third line on the right hand that of pedagogy. With three more sub numbers to each of the three, the model visualizes a variety of meanings that influence on the concept of social pedagogy in a child welfare context.

The child welfare dimension (A) is important in the social pedagogical discussion as the contextual frame of reference and point of departure. In a child welfare context we find Hagen's three definitions. In what we consider a professional point of view, Hagen argues for the third, addressing efforts by private and official organizations (A, 3,). This also includes the second definition based on the Child Welfare Law of 1993 (A, 2). If we follow her argument the different organizations together create a network of institutions active in child welfare work and influencing one another's work. At the same time a professional in a child welfare service position would provide care, training or education in a different way than when positioned in a private organization or in the kindergarten or in primary school and within another legal frame of reference, ideology and responsibility. Hagen's differentiation of the child welfare field in three (A 1, 2, 3) and on behalf of the child, the target group of child welfare, raises a fundamental question of how wide or narrow the group of children shall be defined? Next, the answer to this also influences on the definition of social pedagogical praxis. If we compare Hagen's statement "the general development and welfare" of children and youth (first definition, A,1) with "children in particular need of upbringing, training and care, (third definition, A,3), the last is a limitation of the target group. When she argues for the narrower one (third definition, A,3), this also influences the understanding of social pedagogy praxis in the professional child welfare field. For example is her third definition also a limit to a more general understanding of child and youth socialization (B 1.) Such a view is also supported for example by Madsen when he defines social pedagogy in relation to a failed socialization and as Hagen does, to children and youth who are in a situation where they have special needs or where the society creates such (Madsen 93).

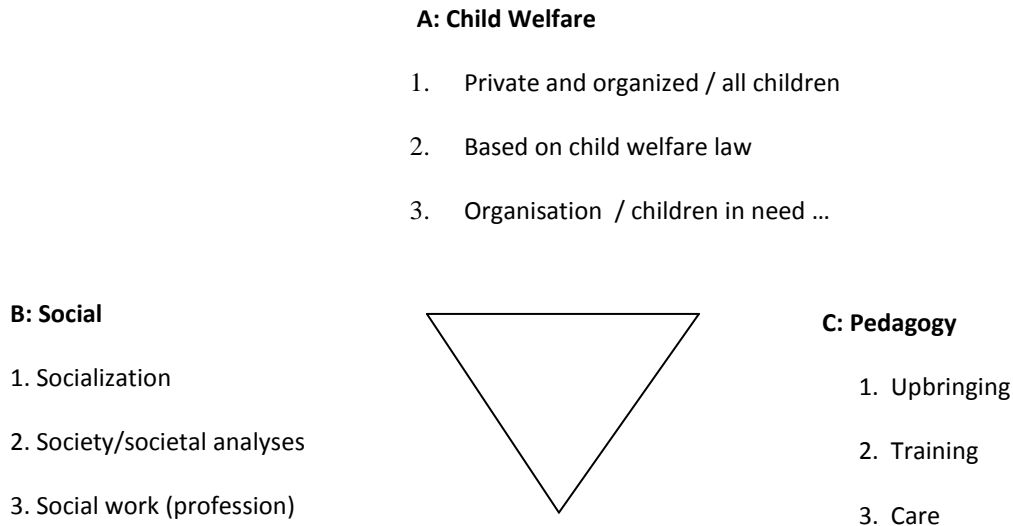


Fig. 1 Bernard,R. (2010) A model of social pedagogy

Social pedagogy in this professional child welfare point of view is nearer to the ideology, task and responsibility in social work (B, 3). Other definitions of social pedagogy include the common socialization of all children and youth (Nordland, 1986, Johanse and Sommer 2006). With the increased efforts in the Norwegian Child Welfare Law on preventive work i.e. to hinder more serious problems to develop, this creates a situation that widens the group of children in the child welfare field and next also social pedagogical praxis. It again raises questions, what is social pedagogy in a child welfare field, whom shall it include and who (what profession) should be responsible for doing what when there is overlap? Is there a difference between social pedagogy in a school context and in a child welfare profession at a particular time? And how is child welfare professional praxis different compared to social work? With the social work profession as an example in comparison to the child welfare professional group (A, 2, B, 3) they are

both elements in the Norwegian welfare state organization. Both services may have the identical family on their records as clients. Their focus is different with regard to the family, their task and responsibility also as it is stated in two separated laws. There are overlaps between the two professional in their holistic approach when analyzing a client's difficult life situation and other professional issues. One important difference is the professional naming and framing. Social work is the praxis and discipline in the profession of social work. Social pedagogy is the praxis and discipline in the child welfare profession. At the same time, the last is considered a social work education (UF 2005).

Depending on how we define the concepts of pedagogy, social and child welfare this can give a variation of more or less similar understanding. The pedagogical dimensions for example, can be in contrast to or also overlap the social dimensions, and visa versa. This variation is the fundament for more or less similar or contradicting opinions, misunderstandings as well as no understanding. In a Wittgenstein understanding of family resemblance this approach allows that some factors are similar, while others may differ considerably, and that many more factors overlap to greater or lesser degree.

Lastly, some comments on the model. The model can be a help in this explorative process of meaning construction. As an abstract construction the triangle model visualizes the concept and the logic of social pedagogy by providing some of the nuances of meaning that are found in literature. However, when some concepts are at the forefront of a model, other concepts implicitly will be relegated to the rear. Another collection of concepts in the forefront would provide us with alternative perspectives. A triangle model has the advantage to maintain the innate complexity of any discussion of social pedagogy. It allows the discussion of social pedagogy to vary; we can also put other concepts in the forefront. A weakness of the triangular model is that the historical dimension is under-communicated. An historical analysis would contribute to the understanding of social pedagogy, by showing how it has changed and developed over time, and particularly or more direct, how the discipline has been influenced by changes in public policy and legislation, changes in the field of practice, and changes in theory production and as it is taught in the education of future child welfare professionals. New

knowledge and understanding of children and youth, their development and situation in modern society, developments in legislation and new initiatives in the child welfare field of practice all reciprocally influence one another. Together they represent the force that develops the discipline of social pedagogy.

Theory of social pedagogy

An initial question when trying to determine which texts should be included in a review of the literature of social pedagogy is whether or not to include texts that deal with relevant topics. Should the review be a narrow one and solely make a study of texts that directly refer to social pedagogy? Should the review be more broadly based and include a variety of topics that are relevant to the discipline of social pedagogy? Hagen, for example, whose text is central for the development of the Norwegian child welfare field and is influential for the development of theory as well as field work practice, uses juridical terminology to identify efforts in the child welfare field rather than describing the practice of child welfare professionals in terms of social pedagogy (Hagen 2001). In similar ways psychological, sociological as well as pedagogical theory deal with topics like communication, cooperation or guidance that are relevant to social pedagogy. The curriculum for the Norwegian bachelor degree program in child welfare education at Oslo University College includes a broadly based required reading (HIO 2009 – 2010, Madsen 2006, Gjertsen 2003, Kvaran 1996, Herberg and Jóhannesdóttir 2007, Hagen 2001).

In Norway and in the Scandinavian countries many texts have been published with titles that are relevant for the child welfare field. In some of the literature, social pedagogy is associated with a particular institution, like residential homes for children and youth or primary and secondary schools (Rasmussen 1986, Nordland 1986, Johansen and Sommer 2006). The theory and practice of social pedagogy is influenced by the context in which practitioners work, the institutional setting in which interventions are made, the institutional ideology, its aims, tasks and responsibilities. The various texts outline the concept of social pedagogy and the contours of practice in more or less different ways,

depending upon the context the book addresses, its target group, and the purposes and aims embedded in its practices.

Some texts about social pedagogy address the way in which children and youth who find themselves in difficult life situations over an extended period of time and who need supports and initiatives of various kinds that can be a help to become better integrated into society (Madsen 1993, 2006, Gjertsen 2003, Kvaran 1996, Rassmussen 1984, Cedersund and Eriksson 2005). Other texts are more generally concerned with the challenges that all children and youth face in contemporary society, and the way to generate good socialization processes, the proper care to be provided to children and youth, relevant education and training opportunities for children and youth and good child-rearing practices (Bø 2000, Nordland 1986, Johansen and Summer 2006).

When we survey the broad based curriculum used in the bachelor program in child welfare education, we often find arguments, discussions and theories that to a greater or lesser degree overlap, even though some of the books are specifically written as discussions within social pedagogy and others are written as discussions within social work or pedagogy. We find parallel discussions regarding the focus upon individuals or an alternative societal focus in many different theories, parallel discussions of utilizing a holistic approach and analysis and parallel arguments providing critiques of various professional ideologies and theories (Mathiesen, 1999, Nordland 1986, Freire 1990). There are also several lines of conflict that readers of the literature of social pedagogy encounter. One discussion can be found between proponents of socialization practices that foster assimilation (to the dominating values of society) and proponents of socialization practices which aim at liberating the child from repressive practices in society that hinder the child from completely developing its potential and modes of expression (Ibid.). Another area of discussion, often to be read between the lines of a text, is the differences between the concept of pedagogy, the concept of social pedagogy and social work in theory and in praxis.

The Norwegian educational context has merged the social pedagogical tradition (and theories of social pedagogy) in Scandinavia and in Continental European societies with the British and American social work tradition (and theories of social work). Some

required readings, such as texts by Madsen and Mathiesen, are based upon the German social pedagogic tradition. Social pedagogy in the German tradition will often refer to texts written by Paul Natorp in the middle and at the end of the 19th century (Mathiesen 2008, 1999, Madsen 2006, Nordland 1986). Others required readings, such as texts by Gjertsen and Herberg and Jóhannesdóttir, are based upon the British and the American social work traditions as their point of departure. The English and the American tradition that bridges social work and social education will often refer to texts written by John Dewey and Herbert Mead (Kokkinn 2005, Levin 2004).

Summary and last comments:

This article has not intended to provide a definite answer to the question of social pedagogy in a child welfare context. Rather its intention was to present and discuss the concept of social pedagogy and this in the light of other concepts that border or overlap the subject.

I have examined social pedagogy placing it in a Norwegian child welfare context. Depending upon how wide or narrow the child welfare field is defined and how wide or narrow the concepts of social and pedagogy are defined, social pedagogy can be considered a discipline concerning with the welfare of children or /and youth who are in particular need of upbringing, education, training and care. Social pedagogy within the context of professional child welfare field can be practiced by persons that work in public and private organizations/institutions. A more narrow definition of child welfare field limits social pedagogy with reference to the Norwegian Child Welfare Law of 1993. A general policy and value in the child welfare field is formulated in 'the best interest of the child' and that of utilizing milder interventions before more severe once are employed. The institutional context will influence on task and responsibility in social pedagogical theory and praxis. The Norwegian state's welfare ideology and organization represents an important frame of reference.

A next step in the analysis was the distinction between the concepts of social and pedagogy. Social was analyzed with regard to socialization and the child, a societal

analytical perspective as well as the third concept, social work and related to a professional perspective. Pedagogy was discussed with reference to the raising of children, their training and care. Depending on how we define the different concepts of pedagogy, social and child welfare this gave a variation of more or less similar or contrasting understandings. The construction of the triangle model represents an analytical tool in this explorative process where understandings differ or overlap to greater or lesser degree. The author's intention is that the triangular model can exemplify how to deal with the ambiguity that is found in discourses of social pedagogy, without abandoning the complexity and nuances that are found in those discourses.

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